

Social Work in the Public Library

HANNAH OLIVER

Where It Is Happening

- First full-time social worker employed through a public library happened in 2009 at the San Francisco Public library- Leah Esguerra
- According to the ALA, there are approximately 16, 500 central and branch buildings for public libraries in the US. As of now:
 - 44 libraries have a full-time social worker
 - 5 libraries have a part-time social worker
 - 18 libraries have social service office hours
 - 60 libraries have social worker interns
- This trend is still new, so statistics of social work intervention are not currently being tracked by the National Association of Social Workers or the American Library Association
- As far as research shows, **Tennessee does not currently employ a social worker through any library system**

Library Transformation

- To the public eye, it seems that libraries are transforming from being just a place of education and resource to more of a community hub
- With this change, an internal change in staff and process must occur to best serve our patrons
- Impactful change is not immediate, but **long-term change** is crucial
- Through social work intervention, the public library can better connect with our community and strengthen the Chattanooga community overall

Chattanooga Library- Downtown Branch

- Internship began on August 26th, 2019
- Goals for internship opportunity:
 - Bring additional service and assistance to support patrons in need of various social services
 - Strengthen staff by offering support, training, and education
- My initial action goals for this semester:
 - Education- Learning about the library culture, vision, goals of service, and policies
 - Engagement & Connection- Get to know staff, connect with patrons, make presence known
 - Observation- Analyze needs for staff, patrons, and identify any gaps in service
 - Community Engagement- networking and building relationships with local organizations in our community

Observations

- For Patrons:
 - Homelessness
 - Mental health challenges
 - Accessibility challenges
 - Literacy issues
 - Lack of adult programming
 - Adolescent behavioral challenges & accessibility challenges
- For Staff:
 - Lack of helpful resource knowledge
 - Overwhelmed or exhausted staff members
 - Lack of communication on best practices for handling challenging patrons

Progress Thus Far

- 8 adult individuals have found either shelter, temporary housing, or enlisted in a housing program
- 3 adult individuals have been assisted in finding employment and completing employment processes
- 2 adult individuals have been able to learn more about social security and how to access these programs
- 1 homeless veteran adult individual was able to be connected to Chattanooga Veteran Services
- 4 adult individuals have been able to discuss personal challenges & receive emotional support and insight
- 1 transgender adult individual received assistance in legally changing all identifying documents to identified gender
- 1 parent and child were assisted in processes through the Dept of Education to ensure education for the child
- 6 children have disclosed personal issues that opened conversation about emotional resilience and coping
- 1 teenager was able to learn how to create a job application account and a resume to find part-time employment
- 3 adolescent incidents have occurred where the intern was able to support staff

Progress Continued

- An updated resource list has been distributed to staff on all floors for additional help with assisting patrons
- Individual & small group meetings have been conducted with staff to learn more about staff experiences
- Attended monthly homeless coalition meetings to improve services offered to homeless patrons
- Consistent communication developed with security guards for further insight on patron issues
- Community relationships formed to connect the library with the outside community

Community Relationships

- Family Promise
- Community Kitchen
- Homeless Health
- Chattanooga Room In the Inn
- Maclellan Family Shelter
- Rescue Mission
- Partnership
- United Way & 2-1-1 Services
- UTC Nursing Services
- Baby University
- Hamilton County Department of Education
- Chattanooga Homeless Coalition
- Legal Aid of East Tennessee
- Chattanooga Veteran Services
- Salvation Army
- UTC Social Work Dept

Important Documents

- Personally developed a more structured way to assess and document patron interactions
 - Client Rights Form
 - Client Case Notes
 - Release of Information Form

Staff Evaluation

- To better understand the needs of staff members, a short survey was created and administered during the staff training day
- Developed short questions to identify where staff members felt they lacked training and in what areas they were most interested in learning more about
- Mostly quantitative questions with an option for a qualitative response at the end

Staff Evaluation Results

- Top Reported Patron Observations by Staff
 - Homelessness
 - Mental Health Challenges
 - Literacy Challenges
 - Transportation Challenges
 - Unemployment

Staff Evaluation Results

- Top Reported Needs for Staff Training
 - Crisis Intervention / De-escalation
 - Mental Health Education
 - Local Resource Knowledge
 - Trauma-Informed Service
 - Emotional Boundaries

Staff Evaluation Results

- “I am not a social worker and don’t think I should be expected to serve as one”
- “The biggest thing I struggle with in my job is conflict resolution and de-escalation”
- “I want to learn more about having boundaries with patrons”
- “Just having a social worker/specialist here is very helpful. Having access to contacts that we are not permitted to is a bonus”
- “I would really appreciate more knowledge on many of these topics...we deal with them all the time and it would be great to be trained and be more confident with them”
- “A social worker is a great idea!”
- “It’s great to have a social worker available to help refer people who have needs that we often times do not have enough time to help”

Moving Forward

- Staff training-
 - first session on crisis intervention/ de-escalation will be on Dec 3rd
 - Trained staff from UTC Social Work Dept will be on-site
 - Online material to review will be available also
- Program development for both adults and children
 - UTC Dept of Nursing health fair- beginning next year
 - Programs focusing on adult literacy and career education
 - Collaboration with 2nd floor for programs focusing on emotional intelligence and coping for youth
 - Begin a focus on combining adult programming with child programming- a stronger family focus
- Continue intervention with patrons
 - Develop process in case management & better organize maintenance of patron relationships